

An address by Representative  
John E. Fogarty at the  
Institute in the Psychology and  
Education of the Educable  
Mentally Retarded Child,  
Boston College, Boston, Mass.,  
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EDUCATING THE MENTALLY RETARDED CHILD FOR LIVING

It is a pleasure for me to be with you here this afternoon. In the first place, it is good to be here in Massachusetts, with which my own State of Rhode Island has had, throughout our common history, such close ties. And it is a particular pleasure to be here at Boston College, and to meet with persons with whom I share a deep and abiding interest in the education of mentally retarded children.

There comes a time in the history of a community, a State, a country, when a problem which has shadowed the hearts and lives of its citizens is discovered anew. Viewed in this new perspective, in the stronger light furnished by man's increased capacity to master his environment--and to minister unto it--the problem which had seemed unknown and unmanageable becomes known and manageable.

At such a time it has become, in the words of the Preacher, "a time to gather together...a time to build up...a time to heal."

For the mentally retarded, their "season under the sun" has arrived--a season foreshadowed well over a century ago by Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe of Boston who, in the early years of the nineteenth century, said of the mentally retarded he had examined,

"There is not one of any age who may not be made more of a man...by patience and kindness directed by skill and energy."

At that time, Dr. Howe's voice was heard by only a few, and the public neglect of the mentally retarded, which had made his observation noteworthy, persisted.

This public neglect began to disappear as soon as we fought--and won--the economic battles of the 1930's, and the battles in Europe and in the far Pacific during the 1940's

As soon as our economic and national survival was insured, the push to solve our Nation's other problems began.

To those of us who were in Congress at the time, the emerging demand for better health services for all our citizens was unmistakable. The demands came from everywhere, and with relentless fervor. They came from dedicated professionals, educators, civic and religious leaders. The people spoke. We listened, questioned, investigated. The National Institute of Mental Health was established in 1948, and the National Institute of Neurological Diseases and Blindness in 1951.

With the establishment of the two health Institutes which have since served as the focal point for Federally sponsored and supported medical research and training programs in mental retardation, those of us in Congress who were interested in these matters had a temporary sense of achievement.

In the winter of 1955 my deep personal concern with this problem began when the plight of the exceptional children in Rhode Island and in our country was twice brought forcibly to my attention.

The first occasion was my meeting with a group of parents in Rhode Island. Shortly thereafter, I read the speech on mental retardation given by His Eminence Richard Cardinal Cushing--then Archbishop of Boston--at the Dedication Ceremony of St. Coletta School at Hanover.

When I returned to Washington, I inquired into the matter and found that no Federal funds were specifically allocated for programs to conquer mental retardation. The Appropriations Committee report that year said:

"So little attention has been paid to the problem (of mental retardation) that we have only the haziest notion of what percentage of the unfortunate children, of at least as unfortunate parents, could be helped medically and through educational techniques fitting their needs, so that they could lead useful and satisfying lives. We have an equally hazy notion of the causes of the problem--how much is due to brain injury, how much is due to the effect of environment, to heredity, and so forth."

For each succeeding year since then, Federal support for programs for the mentally retarded has increased. During the current fiscal year--it is estimated the Federal Government will have spent \$128,504,000 for prevention and treatment of mental retardation, and to maintain the income of the mentally retarded through the programs of the Social Security Administration.

However, as stated by the President in his Message of February 5, our needs in this field are still great. These include: (a) the providing of facilities and programs for early diagnosis and continuous and comprehensive care, in the community, of those suffering from mental retardation; (b) the restoration and revitalization of the lives of the mentally retarded in the community through better health programs and strengthened educational services; and (c) the reinforcing of the will and capacity of our communities to meet the problems of mental retardation in order that the communities, in turn, can reinforce the will and capacity of individuals and individual families to meet these problems.

The President emphasized in this Message that if our Nation is to live up to its own standards of compassion and dignity and achieve the maximum use of its manpower, we must, as a Nation, seek to bestow the full benefits of our society on those who suffer from mental retardation.

In short, we must, as a Nation, do what you are attempting to do as educators--prepare them for full citizenship.

Though we have done much, in the past decade and a half, to help the mentally retarded, they have remained victims of the ancient but

persistent belief that mental retardation is a hopeless, incurable affliction.

While you, as educators, know that most of the mentally retarded can be educated and helped, the persistence of this belief in the public mind and the negative attitudes that accompany it have prevented this nation from launching a full-scale attack on the problems of mental retardation.

Because, under our present system of care, many of our mentally retarded are not properly trained and educated to achieve their maximum productivity, several billions of dollars are lost to our economy annually. And, in addition to present Federal expenditures for the mentally retarded, States and localities spend over one-half billion dollars for care and services for the mentally retarded.

Yet it may be said that for the five million Americans who suffer from some degree of mental retardation, our present system of care could better be called our system of "don't care."

And it is among the millions of retarded who remain in our communities--those whom you will be teaching--that our "don't care" system has been most vicious.

Time and again our scientists and professional workers have found these relationships functioning in our society: where families are weak, community ties tenuous, educational and employment opportunities lacking, there you will find the mentally retarded clustered.

In city tenements and rural slums, the intellectual blight that characterizes these neighborhoods is associated with the higher incidence of mental retardation found among school children coming from these

neighborhoods.

Yet in our communities, rich or poor, urban or rural, we have done little to help the mentally retarded. Fewer than 30,000 mentally retarded individuals were served by our psychiatric outpatient clinics in 1959, and only 20,000 received clinical services in programs supported by the Children's Bureau in 1961.

Although the retarded child does not differ from the normal child in his need to be properly prepared for adult responsibilities, only one out of five mentally retarded school-age children is enrolled in special education programs in public schools.

We need 75,000 specially prepared teachers to instruct the mentally retarded. Since we have fewer than one-third that number now, your dedication to teaching the retarded child means that you are making, or will make, a vital contribution to the national good.

Time does not stand still for the mentally retarded child while the world around him quibbles about what proportion of his total needs now and in the future it is going to provide: whether he will get 10 percent of the services he needs, or 25 percent., or 50 percent. The passage of time will make only more desperate the needs of the retarded that are not being met today. For it is now that the unborn infant's mother needs care. It is now that the toddler needs a careful diagnostic workup. It is now that the child needs special education. And it is now that millions of the retarded need special facilities in their communities, near their own homes.

This year we face, as a Nation, an unprecedented opportunity. First, as a result of the work of the President's Panel on Mental

Retardation, the facts regarding mental retardation have been clarified as never before.

Second, the President of the United States, in an historic message to Congress, has used the weight of his great office to lead the Nation into better ways of dealing with the medical, social, and economic burdens caused by mental retardation.

Third, the people have indicated by their response to the President's Message that it is their will, as well as their desire, that the mentally retarded be given appropriate care, treatment, and education in their home communities.

Fourth, I have no doubts but that Congressional action this year will result in legislation that will greatly increase the number of retarded children who are properly prepared for life.

Now, what of the future? For some--perhaps many of you-- this Institute will prove to be the beginning of a lifetime dedicated to the devoted care and education of children and adolescents who suffer from some degree of mental retardation.

Your joys, satisfactions and sorrows will be similar to those of all educators. You will have the joy of seeing a child's intellectual and social capacities develop as the direct result of your care and your skill. You will have the satisfaction of seeing your boys and girls-- many or most of your boys and girls--become self-sustaining adults. And you will be saddened by the fact that some of the children you teach-- for reasons beyond your control--will never live up to their potential.

And, like other educators teaching in this rapidly moving century and rapidly changing country of ours, the conditions under which you will

be teaching ten and fifteen years hence will be quite different from those of today.

Since many of these changes will have a direct bearing upon the problems of the mentally retarded--and hence upon your problems as an educator--I would like to indicate what some of them will be.

First there are the changes occurring in families. Families are growing larger--hence the retarded child, who needs extra parental attention, will be called upon to share his parents with a larger number of brothers and sisters. In addition, the special needs of retarded children place extra financial burdens on the family. Thus many mothers of retarded children seek to supplement the family income, while at the same time the problem of providing for the retarded child's care in the mother's absence is more complex.

Providing for the retarded child's care, training, and education will be further complicated by the American family's increasing mobility--with community and friendship ties disrupted each time the family moves.

Changes similar in their impact will take place in our schools, and within the labor market. The general level of education is rising in the Nation. As this trend continues, the mentally retarded whose disability shows itself in this area will be more marked. As educational standards and achievements continue to rise, a greater number of individuals who cannot keep up or achieve these levels will be discovered and will demand attention.

Furthermore, the educable children who will begin their formal schooling next fall will face, at the conclusion of their education,



a labor market quite different from that of today.

In the past, the majority of the mentally retarded children completing special classes for the educable in urban areas were able to find jobs on their own. Increased industrial specialization and the growing trend to automation will pose new problems. Special programs, including the provision of aided and protected conditions of employment may become more needed.

Not only the world in which they live but the mentally retarded themselves will differ from what they now are. The discovery and application of preventive measures will increase rapidly--thus fewer children will be born with mental defects, and fewer will develop retardation at some later stage of their childhood. Increased medical and scientific knowledge will make it possible to treat many cases of mental retardation more effectively. But, at the same time, these benefits will increase the life span of those mentally retarded persons for whom medical science will not be able to provide a cure, thereby making necessary additional provisions for the elderly retarded.

Though we as a Nation have made a brave beginning in developing a truly national program that will enable us to educate the mentally retarded to their maximum potential, we must continue to anticipate problems that will arise in the future, and to make suitable provisions to meet these problems on a national, state, and community level.

Thus I trust and hope that as the children you will be teaching grow in knowledge, in skill, and in grace, the provisions--both public and private--that we make for them will keep pace with their growth.

It has been a pleasure for me to be with you today. I wish I could

share with you the remainder of your experiences here at this Institute, as you further equip yourself to teach the educable child, and to prepare him for life.

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